

GREEK VASES: SHAPES AND USES

THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART •• MUSEUM NEWS



USEFUL FORMS

We are so used to looking at Greek ceramics as objects of art safely protected in museum cases that we may forget that these beautiful objects were designed for use, and that their shapes were primarily functional.

Archaeologists and classical scholars have rightly concerned themselves with the paintings which decorate most Greek ceramics, for they are all we have left of Greek pictorial art. From these scenes we can learn much about Greek history and mythology. However, we can also learn much about the daily life of the Greeks from the useful shapes of their ceramic vessels. Water had to be carried from wells (it was left to the Romans to engineer the remarkable aqueducts to carry water in great quantity for long distances). Olive oil and wine

were staples as they have always been in the Mediterranean world, and so ceramics to store, ladle, carry and to drink were devised. The Greeks liked their wines diluted, so special vessels to mix wine and water are common. And lastly, the Greeks obviously so prized their own ceramics that they gave them (filled with olive oil) as prizes in their great ceremonial games.

The basic shapes devised for useful purposes and repeated with little variation over several centuries comprise the subject of this publication. All the vessels illustrated are in the collection of this Museum, and unless otherwise designated, were the gifts of or acquired with funds bequeathed by Edward Drummond Libbey.

Otto Wittmann, Director

Cover (left to right): Attic black-figured *lekythos*, about 500-470 B.C., Ht. 10½ in., 52.66; Attic black-figured *skyphos*, the *Theseus Painter*, about 490 B.C., Ht. 6⅛ in., 63.27; Attic black-figured amphora with stand, the *Acheloos Painter*, Ht. (with stand) 23¼ in., 58.69; Attic red-figured *kylix*, the *Triptolemos Painter*, about 490 B.C., Ht. 5⅜ in., 61.26; Attic black-figured *hydria*, the *Antimenes Painter*, about 525 B.C., Ht. 19¾ in., 56.70.

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GREEK VASES: SHAPES AND USES

Greek art and life can be clearly traced through ceramics, which furnish continuous evidence of Greek civilization from Bronze Age Crete to Hellenistic times. Pottery often provides the only reliable chronology when other forms of archaeological evidence are lacking. Because no major examples of wall and panel paintings are known, painted pottery is the only evidence we have of Greek pictorial art.

Because they now represent all we know of Greek painting, the fact that these vases are impressive achievements of the potter's art is often overlooked. Their useful shapes seem less interesting than the endless variations of scenes on their painted surfaces.

As in architecture, Greek pottery shapes show clear articulation between parts which rarely occurs so consistently in pottery from any other civilization. The mouth, neck, body, handles and foot stand out as units within an unified design. Architectural terms are often applied to these ceramics in modern terminology.

Nearly all Greek vases were wheel thrown. While this technique of individual production might have led to countless variations in shape, the opposite is true. A limited number of shapes were continuously refined during the great age of Greek ceramic production.

The thin walls and highly refined proportions of these vases show their technical superiority. However, their intended use was also a determining factor in their design. Carefully turned lips and spouts were created for drinking and pouring. The handles, which seem to 'grow' out of the bodies are conveniently placed for ease in lifting and carrying. This concern for function enhances the appeal of Greek vases, for they were made for uses which have changed little since antiquity. Pitchers, bowls, cups and perfume containers still play a

role in our lives just as they did in Greece some 25 centuries ago.

Nomenclature of Greek vase shapes has long been a problem for scholars. The difficulty is that despite the many vase names mentioned by ancient authors, the attempt to mate these names with specific shapes is often futile. In some cases a name refers to several vessel types. Thus, scholars have often assigned ancient names more as a matter of convenience than from precise evidence.

The high quality of Greek vases in museum collections today is not representative of those used by the average Greek citizen. Similar, but less carefully executed wares would have been current in daily life. In this respect, it is interesting to note that particularly prized vases were often repaired in antiquity. Figs. 20 and 26 show the drill holes for the lead clips of ancient restoration.

Vases have mostly been found in the ruins of houses, or of sanctuaries and tombs where they were placed as offerings to the dead. Etruscan copies of Athenian vases and the great number of Greek vases found in Etruscan tombs confirm that the Etruscan taste for these wares formed a considerable part of Athenian foreign trade in ceramics.

The vases in this publication are grouped according to their uses: large vessels for storing, mixing and serving wine and other liquids; drinking cups, and oil and cosmetic containers. Together they give a clear view of life in ancient Greece; their intimacy contrasts with the more monumental achievements of architecture and sculpture.

I am most grateful to Professor Richard Krill of the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of Toledo for his help in translating the passages from ancient authors.

Kurt T. Luckner

AMPHORA

An amphora is a jar with two handles attached vertically from the mouth or lip to the body. As a storage vessel, the amphora usually served as a container for liquids such as wine, oil, and milk. However, the jar also was used for preserving perishable solid commodities:

Slices of dolphin were found preserved in amphorae, and dolphin blubber in other vessels.
Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 5.4.28

Because the jars were so widely used, the word *amphora* came to mean a general amount of liquid measure. However, as with the modern coffee cup, the varying sizes of amphorae demonstrate the futility of trying to determine exactly how much an average amphora really held.

The Toledo collection includes several examples of 'neck amphorae', so called because the neck stands out from the body of the vase. The amphora in fig. 1 is the type favored during the late 6th and early 5th century B.C. The flaring echinus lip resembles the echinus molding forming the bell of the capital in the Doric order of architecture. The neck is concave and stands out from the rest of the vase not only because of the raised ridge around its bottom, but also because of its painted palmette decoration. The triple handles, formed from three rolls of clay joined into a broad strap, flare from the neck and join it to the broadest part of the shoulder of the vase. The spreading foot forms a strong, elegant support.

Another type of neck amphora has a pointed bottom and separate supporting stand (fig. 4 and cover). The prominent lip is called a 'torus lip' be-

*The storage jar is filled with good white barley
And the amphorae with fragrant red wine.*

Aristophanes, *The Plutus*, 806-807

cause of its resemblance to the lowest molding at the base of a column. The pointed bottom makes the vase quite unstable, indicating that it was intended to be used with a stand. The concave sides of the stand set off the bulging profile of the vase.

During the Panathenaic festival, held once every four years in Athens, a special type of amphora filled with oil was awarded as a prize to the victors in athletic competitions. These amphorae are usually inscribed: 'One of the prizes from Athens' (fig. 3). Although Panathenaic amphorae were only made as prizes for Athenian athletic contests, their shape does occur in vases not intended for this purpose. However, the prize inscription running vertically beside the column, appears only on the Panathenaic amphorae. Because the wide body tapers sharply to a small disc foot, these vases would have been somewhat top heavy when filled with the prize oil. This suggests that these large vessels were intended as show pieces and not to withstand the rigor of everyday use.

Toledo has one vase shape which is unique. The amphora in fig. 4 is the only one made in Lakonia (Sparta) to have survived. Although it may be generally classified as a neck amphora, this Lakonian example is unlike the Athenian neck amphorae in figs. 1-3. The lip is buff color, accentuating its distinctive lower edge. The neck is in two parts: a bulging upper section to which the handles are joined and a lower, concave section set off by ridges. The curious profile of this vessel underlines the fact that general vase shapes, such as the amphora, had wide variations when adopted by local potters outside of Athens.

1. Amphora
 Attic black-figure
 The Antimenes Painter
 Herakles fighting the Amazon Andromache
 About 525-500 B.C.
 Ht. $14\frac{3}{8}$ in. (46.5 cm.)
 55.225



2. Amphora
 Attic black-figure
 The Acheloos Painter
 Athena with Herakles and the Ceryneian hind
 About 510 B.C.
 Ht. (without stand) $19\frac{3}{4}$ in. (50.2 cm.)
 58.69





3. Panathenaic Amphora
Attic black-figure
The Kleophrades Painter
Athena; inscribed:
"One of the prizes from Athens."
About 490 B.C.
Ht. 24¹⁵/₁₆ in. (63.8 cm.)
61.24

4. Amphora
Lakonian, found at Vulci, Italy
The Naukratis Painter
About 560 B.C.
Ht. 10¹³/₁₆ in. (27.5 cm.)
64.53



PELIKE

Although the term *pelike* is mentioned by several ancient authors, it was used to indicate a variety of vase shapes. For convenience, archaeologists decided to use the term to describe a pear-shaped, broad-mouthed variation on the amphora in which the neck forms a continuous curve with the body. The shape first appeared in the late 6th century B.C. and was popular until about 300 B.C.

The region of Greek colonization in southern Italy, known as Magna Graecia, produced several distinctive local wares. The pelike in fig. 5 was made in Apulia, a province in southeastern Italy. Although somewhat less sophisticated than Athenian wares, the shape's flaring lip, stalwart handles and bulbous body descends from Attic prototypes.

Another pelike (fig. 6) is typical of the pottery produced in the Apulian port city of Gnathia. In general appearance, this vase is closely related to bronze vessels. Precise vertical ribs punctuate the swelling body. The bands on the narrow neck are slip-painted renditions of gold necklaces which sometimes decorated Athenian "black varnish ware" vases.



5. *Pelike*
South Italian red-figure
400-350 B.C.
Ht. 7 in. (17.8 cm.)
12.1227



6. *Pelike*
Gnathia Ware
South Italian (Apulia)
About 325-300 B.C.
Ht. 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (22.2 cm.)
24.110

HYDRIA

*With difficulty did I just fill the hydria at dawn
amid the chatter of the crowd and clanking of
earthenware vessels.*

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 326-327

A hydria is a water jug with three handles: two joined horizontally to the sides of the vessel which were used for lifting, and a vertical handle at the back for lifting and pouring. The use of this vessel as a water jar often appears in scenes (especially on hydriai) which show women filling hydriai at a fountain, as in fig. 7. The vessel was held by the horizontal handles while being filled and then lifted to be balanced on the cushion which was placed on the head for protection from the considerable weight of the filled jar.

Two basic types of hydriai are known. The first, with the neck set off from the rest of the body, was popular during the 6th century B.C. (figs. 8 and 9). The sharp angle at the juncture of the shoulder and body gives the shoulder a distinctness which provided the painter with a broad semi-circular area to be decorated with a scene in addition to that on the body.

The hydria in fig. 10, whose neck forms a con-

tinuous curve with the body, belongs to a class of mixed vase shapes called "black varnish ware", popular in the first half of the 4th century B.C. Almost entirely devoid of painted decoration, these vases consciously draw attention to their sinuous profiles which are closely related to metallic vessel shapes. The decoration of this hydria is confined to the egg and dart pattern on the lip and the raised wreath encircling the neck. The turnings of the foot add a restrained vitality to the wiry profile.

In addition to its function as a water jar, hydriai had other functions in antiquity. A distinct group of hydriai, found at Hadra, the cemetery of Alexandria, the center of Greek culture in Egypt under the Ptolemies, were used as urns for burying ashes of the dead. Plutarch also mentions the use of the hydria as a cinerary urn:

*He received them (the ashes) in a golden hydria,
and placed them in the admiral's largest ship.*

Plutarch, *Demetrios*, 53.1



7. Hydria (detail), showing hydriai in use
Attic black-figure
The "A D" Painter
About 520 B.C.
Ht. (without handle) 23³/₈ in. (59.3 cm.)
61.23



8. Hydria
Attic black-figure
The "A D" Painter
Women at a fountain
About 520 B.C.
Ht. (without handle) $23\frac{3}{8}$ in. (59.3 cm.)
61.23



9. Hydria
Attic black-figure
The "S" Painter
Herakles leading Cerberus from Hell while
Athena and Hermes look on
About 510 B.C.
Ht. (without handle) $17\frac{1}{4}$ in. (43.8 cm.)
69.371



10. Hydria
Attic "black varnish ware"
About 360 B.C.
Ht. (without handle) 16 in. (40.5 cm.)
69.372

KRATER

The ancient Greeks usually drank their wine mixed with water. A favorite proportion was one part wine to two parts water, mixed in a large bowl called a krater. Several varieties of kraters are known, although the names of these kraters are modern.

One is the calyx krater, so named because it resembles the calyx of a flower (fig. 11). The body is in two parts, the upper (on which the scene is painted) is slightly concave, the lower, convex. The thick handles curve sharply upward from just below the juncture of the two sections of the body. The mouth is in two parts, a rolled upper section and a slightly concave lower section decorated with a stylized leaf pattern. The shape first appeared at the end of the 6th century and continued through the 4th century B.C.

A second type, the bell krater, resembles an in-

Some of the messengers and busy attendants were mixing wine and water in kraters.

Homer, *Odyssey*, 1.110

verted bell (fig. 12). The handles are placed high on the body and curve upward. Like the calyx krater in fig. 11, the mouth is in two degrees, a rolled upper section and a slightly concave lower section. This vessel was made about a century after that in fig. 11, and its shape was particularly favored by red-figure painters.

The column krater first appeared in the first half of the 6th century. Competition from Athenian ware led Corinthian potters to produce large-scaled vases. The column krater in figs. 13 and 14 dates from about 560 B.C. and exemplifies the large Corinthian wares which challenged Athenian vases at this period.

The name *column krater* comes from the pair of column-shaped handles supporting the overhanging sections of the lip which form part of the handles.



11. Calyx Krater
Attic black-figure
The Rycroft Painter
Ajax and Achilles playing draughts while Athena looks on
About 520-510 B.C.
Ht. 15³/₄ in. (40 cm.)
63.26



12. Bell Krater
Attic red-figure
Helen and Menelaos
440-430 B.C.
Ht. 12³/₆ in. (30.9 cm.)
67.154



13 and 14. Column Krater
Corinthian
About 560 B.C.
Obverse: Marriage procession
Reverse: Calydonian boar hunt
Ht. 13½ in. (34.3 cm.)
70.2



STAMNOS

Let someone bring out a stamnos and a kylix.
Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 199

Although the ancient evidence for calling the vessel in fig. 15 a *stamnos* is scanty, the name is current in modern usage. We know from illustrations of this shape in scenes on other vases that it was a wine jar with a short neck and two horizontal handles joined to the body just below the shoulder. The shape was in favor for only a century, from the end of the 6th to the end of the 5th century B.C. The distinct parts of the vessel are emphasized by the ridges separating the body from the neck and from the foot. The handles are formed of triple rolls of clay fused into straps.

15. *Stamnos*
Attic red-figure
The Syleus Painter
Nike between Poseidon and Amphitrite
About 490-480 B.C.
Ht. 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (35.9 cm.)
56.58



OINOCHOE

Bringing them into the Temple of Aphrodite at Eryx, they showed them the dedicatory offerings: phialai, oinochoai, censers and many other table trappings . . .

Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 6.46

The oinochoe is a jug for ladling or pouring wine from a krater, in which the wine was mixed with water, to a drinking vessel such as a kylix. An example of it in use can be seen in fig. 15 where a Nike pours wine for Neptune and Amphitrite.

The shape exists in many varieties. The oinochoe in fig. 16 was made in Corinth, and has a round mouth with two 'ears', thoroughly nonfunctional elements which are ceramic vestiges of similar shapes on the mouths of bronze vessels. The neck is set off from the body by a ridge which breaks the continuous profile curve from the lip to the foot.

Compared to fig. 16, the Corinthian oinochoe in fig. 17 shows the variety of oinochoai made at the same time. The high strap handle joins the lidded mouth. The lid suggests that mixed wine was also kept on hand in such vessels. The trefoil mouth was a simple development from the round mouth, the edges of which were pushed upward to form a graceful spout to aid pouring. The vase painter has chosen to emphasize the individuality of the sections of the vessel's shape.

The type of slender oinochoe in fig. 18 has been named 'olpe' by archaeologists, who took for the purpose an ancient word that broadly meant any oil or wine jug.

The oinochoe in fig. 19 was made in Apulia, southern Italy and dates from 375-350 B.C. The continuous curve from the mouth to the foot emphasizes the stout body, repeated in the body of the comic character to the right of the handle.



16. Oinochoe (Olpe)
Corinthian
The Painter of Vatican 73
About 640-630 B.C.
Ht. 12¾ in. (32.4 cm.)
63.22

17. Lidded Oinochoe
Corinthian
The Painter of Vatican 73
About 640-630 B.C.
Ht. $9\frac{5}{8}$ in. (24.5 cm.)
63.23



18. Oinochoe (Olpe)
Attic black-figure
Quadriga
About 530 B.C.
Ht. $8\frac{3}{4}$ in. (22.3 cm.)
61.22



19. Oinochoe
South Italian (Apulia) red-figure
The Felton Painter
Dionysiac scene
About 375-350 B.C.
Ht. $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. (21.6 cm.)
67.136

KYLIX

The Scythians exchange oaths in the following manner: they draw blood from the parties taking the oath by making a small hole or incision in the body with an awl or knife; then, pouring wine into a great earthenware kylix, they mix the blood and wine . . .

Herodotus, *Histories*, 4.70

Herodotus describes a remarkable use of this common drinking cup. The quote from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (page 73) mentions a more typical use. The kylix is a drinking cup with two handles, a shallow bowl and usually a high foot. Inscriptions with *kylix* on these cups are the best evidence for applying this name to them.

The kylix was popular from the end of the 6th to the beginning of the 5th century B.C. The shape's broad flaring bowl provided both large and challenging surfaces for black and red-figure painters.

Several types of kylikes have been defined according to which parts of the profile have been set off from the rest of the vessel. The first, with the

lip and foot set off from the bowl, is exemplified by the kylix in fig. 20. Below the thin line emphasizing the separation between mouth and bowl is the inscription: "Tleson, son of Nearchos, made me."

A second type, in which the lip forms a continuous curve with the body, but with the foot offset, appears in fig. 21. The type was a favorite of the workshop of the great Athenian potter Nikosthenes.

A third type has the lip, bowl, and foot forming a continuous curve. Although the kylix by the potter Euergides in fig. 22 has a raised ridge where the stem joins the foot, it can be assigned to this general class.

20. Kylix
Attic black-figure
Tleson potter and perhaps painter
Inscribed: 'Tleson, Son of Nearchos made me.'
About 550 B.C., Ht. 6 in. (15.2 cm.), 58.70



21. Kylix
 Attic black-figure
 Perhaps by the potter Nikosthenes
 Head of Athena between eyes
 About 520 B.C.
 Ht. 4 in. (10.2 cm.)
 67.135



22. Kylix
 Attic red-figure
 Potted by Euergides
 The Euergides Painter
 Herakles killing Kyknos
 About 515 B.C.
 Ht. $4\frac{9}{16}$ in. (11.6 cm.)
 61.25

SKYPHOS

*When he dined and satisfied his soul with food,
He filled the skyphos, from which he used to drink,
and gave it to him
Full of wine.*

Homer, *Odyssey*, 14.111-113

The skyphos is a deep cup with a low foot and two handles. The shape was associated with the mythological hero Herakles, who is often represented with the paws of the Nemean lion skin tied in a square knot on his chest. Such knots, called 'Heraklean knots' often appear on the handles of skyphoi.

One kind of skyphos (fig. 23) has upturned handles joined to the bowl below the lip. This Athenian example has a rare groove outside the body

just below the lip. Another type (fig. 24) has handles set almost level with the lip and a rounded 'torus' foot.

The position of the handles on both cups suggests that they, like the kylix, were raised to the lips by inserting the thumbs upward through the handles with the four fingers of each hand overlapping and encircling the back of the cup.



23. Skyphos
Attic black-figure
About 540 B.C.
Ht. 5¼ in. (13.3 cm.)
69.368



24. Skyphos
South Italian (Apulia) red-figure
About 330 B.C.
Ht. 3⅞ in. (12.4 cm.)
12.1226

KALATHOS

*When you have greatly admired the ancient reliefs,
You will drink Astyanax (new wine) from the
kalathoi of Priam.*

Martial, *Epigrams*, 8.6.15

Although the Greek term *kalathos* means both 'wool basket' (as appears in the scene on the pyxis in fig. 40) and 'cup', their shapes are quite similar, thereby explaining the occurrence of one word for two different vessels. The large cup-shaped kalathoi seems to be a variation of a krater with a spout near the base. Smaller cup or beaker shapes, like that in fig. 26, have the modern name kalathoi, though they certainly did not serve the same mixing function as their larger counterparts. The shape is rare; only five examples are known to have survived.

25. *Kalathos*
Attic black-figure
Dancing men
About 540 B.C.
Ht. 4¼ in. (10.5 cm.), 67.134



KYATHOS

*Whenever the royal cupbearers offer the cups to
the kings, they ladle off some with a kyathos, pour
it into their left hands and swallow it down so that
if they should attempt a poisoning they would gain
nothing in the process.*

Xenophon, *Cyropedia*, 1.3.9ff.

The kyathos is basically a wine ladle in the form of a modern tea cup with an elongated vertical loop handle. The shape clearly developed from a bronze prototype, examples of which survive. These bronze ladles often occur in scenes on other vases. The shape was probably developed by the Etruscans of central Italy. The kyathos in fig. 25 is representative of a large group made in Athens, but only one of which has been actually excavated there. Evidence suggests that the enterprising Athenians manufactured kyathoi for export to Etruria where there was a taste for this special shape.

26. *Kyathos*
Attic black-figure
About 520 B.C.
Ht. (without handle) 6¼ in. (15.6 cm.), 66.110



KANTHAROS

I then saw Hermaiskos gulping down one of those hefty kantharoi (of wine) with his blanket and knapsack lying nearby.

Alexis, Krateias in
Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XI.473d

A kantharos is a drinking cup with two high handles, often with a thin stem and a broad foot. The application of this name to this shape is based upon its description in ancient literature and its association with Dionysus in literature, in vase painting and in sculpture.

A kantharos in the Louvre bears an inscription calling the vessel a *kotylos*. The only explanation for this supposed discrepancy is that *kotylos* was a generic term for cups, of which the kantharos is only one variety.

The shape is generally not common in Athenian ceramics. Although many representations of it occur in vase paintings, the vessel must have normally been cast in metal. However, one type of kantharos was popular in Athens. The kantharos in fig.

27 is one of a large group of Athenian 5th century kantharoi, the bowl of which was molded in two parts and joined into the form of human heads. The satyr's head of this example is whimsical, imparting to the cup the feeling usually produced by the wine drunk from it.

The kantharos in fig. 28 comes from southern Italy (Apulia) and is a shape that is highly impractical to have been made in earthenware, which is so vulnerable to breakage. The foot, although broad, is not an adequately stable base for such a vessel when filled with wine. The flamboyant loop handles have small appendages, perhaps finger holds, which must inevitably have been lost with use. The entire shape would appear to have been much better suited to metal.



27. Satyr's Head Kantharos
Attic
Late 5th Century B.C.
Ht. 5¾ in. (14.6 cm.)
17.134



28. Kantharos
South Italian (Apulia) red-figure
Late 4th Century B.C.
Ht. (with handles) 7¾ in. (19.7 cm.)
12.1243

PHIALE

As the sun rose, Xerxes poured a libation from a golden phiale into the sea and prayed to the sun that he should encounter no misfortune which would prevent him from subduing Europe to its farthest borders.

Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.54

The term *phiale* refers to a shallow bowl without handles or foot used for drinking or pouring offerings. Examples of both uses occur in the scenes painted on the vases in figs. 5 and 15. The name has also been used to refer to the later platter shape produced in southern Italy that does have handles and a foot.

The elaborate vessel in figs. 29 and 30 was made in Apulia. The handles and mushroom-shaped decorative knobs are highly impractical ceramic de-

tails which betray the vessel's metal ancestors.

The shape and flamboyant painted decoration of the dish tell much about its use. The prominent handles mean that the dish was probably carried to the dining table filled with food. The decoration on both the inside and the underside show it was intended to be seen as much from below as from above. Guests seated or reclining at a banquet could thereby admire the platter as it was carried to them filled with food as well as afterward when the platter was empty.



29 and 30. *Phiale*
South Italian (Apulia) red-figure
Eroses
About 330 B.C.
Ht. (to lip) 4¾ in. (12.1 cm.)
67.137



LEKYTHOS

*She gave her luxurious olive oil in a golden lekythos
To be used in bathing with her handmaidens.*

Homer, *Odyssey*, 6.79-80

The term lekythos in ancient Greece was used in a broad sense to indicate any vase that contained oil or unguents. Today the word is used for a one handled jug with a thin neck and deep mouth used for bathing or as offerings to the dead.

One type of Athenian lekythos with a squat and bulbous body appears in figs. 31 and 32. Such vases are often decorated with scenes of feminine life, indicating that this type of lekythos was most commonly used by women. On this vase the scene is one of coquettish love. A young maiden tosses knucklebones hoping to learn of the love of a suitor, who sits beyond her holding a spear. Eros, the god of love, sits between the two and assists the maiden with the knucklebones.

The vase is small, for perfume was an expensive commodity. The thin neck let only a small amount

into the deep mouth when the vase was tipped for pouring.

A second type of Athenian lekythos (figs. 33 and 34) is much larger than that in figs. 31 and 32. Although similar in shape to the squat type, the taller example has a pronounced shoulder, elongated body and a disk foot separated from the body. The shoulder is set off from the body by a distinctive band of tendril decoration.

Although the size of such a vase would seem to indicate that the amount of perfume required to fill it would have cost a considerable sum, x-rays of these large lekythoi have shown that many have an interior, smaller container just below the neck. If used as an offering to the dead, a large amount of expensive perfume would then not have been wasted.



31 and 32. *Lekythos*
Attic red-figure
Circle of the
Meidias Painter
*Eros with youth
and maiden*
425-400 B.C.
Ht. 5 1/8 in. (13.0 cm.)
17.135

33 and 34. Lekythos
Attic red-figure
The Providence Painter
Akrisios, Danae and Perseus
About 470 B.C.
Ht. 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (40.9 cm.)
69.369



ALABASTRON

The alabastron is a narrow-necked perfume container with an elongated body, flaring lip and rounded bottom. The vase usually is handleless, although 'ears' with holes for a carrying cord sometimes occur below the lip.

Alabastra exist in various materials, especially alabaster and glass, as well as earthenware. Egypt may have provided the Greeks with not only this shape, but also its name. Egyptian alabaster and 'sand core' glass examples both date from the 7th century B.C. Sethe pointed out in 1933 that *a-la-baste*, meaning 'vase of Ebaste', goddess of the Egyptian city of Bubastos, is probably the source of the name. In Greek vase painting, the alabastron is common in scenes of women bath-

*He requests in return that you pour
Into the alabastron one kyathos of peace
So that he need not enlist in the army
But rather remain comfortably at home with his
bride.*

Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, 1051-1053

ing or bringing offerings to the graves.

The shape of the alabastron was obviously determined by its function. The vase is small because the perfume which it contained was a precious and expensive commodity. The neck and mouth are tiny in order to allow only a small amount of perfume to flow through it at one pouring, while the flaring lip acted as an applicator. Although Athenian alabastra, common in the 6th and 5th centuries, are slender, Corinthian examples of the 7th century (figs. 35 and 36) are quite bulbous. Corinth was a thriving commercial center; since one of its main exports was perfume, it is logical that containers for it were made there.

35 and 36. Alabastron
Corinthian
Sphinx and Panther
625-600 B.C.
Ht. $7\frac{1}{8}$ in. (18.1 cm.), 71.135



ARYBALLOS

*Then from an aryballos she poured
Ambrosia on your head but pickle brine on
Paphlagon's.*

Aristophanes, *Knights*, 1094-1095

An aryballos is a small oil container with a narrow neck. The word was not used for this shape in Classical Athens, and is probably a name used by the Dorians, the ancient Hellenic tribe which overthrew the Mycenaeans and occupied the Peloponnese and Crete beginning in the 12th century B.C.

Aryballoi are often shown in scenes on vases as hanging from the wrist of an athlete or on a wall, or occasionally being used by bathing women. The shape was not popular in Athens, for very few Attic examples in earthenware have been found. Potters in Corinth, a perfume producing center, made countless aryballoi, like that in fig. 37, as containers for scented oils. The shape of this vessel, typical of Corinthian aryballoi, enjoyed only a brief period of popularity in Athens during the third quarter of the 6th century. The spherical body has a disk-shaped mouth which served as an applicator for the oily perfume. It has a broad, right-angled handle through which the carrying thong was threaded. The size of the aryballos is perfectly scaled to be held in the palm of the hand when using the vessel.



37. Aryballos
Corinthian
600-575 B.C.
Ht. 4¼ in. (10.8 cm.)
21.66

LEKANIS

*... just as in a public procession, each maid is
assigned a different object to carry: silver lek-
anides, ewers, mirrors and an array of pyxides as
in a chemist's shop, ...*

Lucian, *Amores*, 39ff

The lekanis is a flat, footed dish with two horizontal handles and a removable lid. Although its mention in ancient literature includes a variety of uses, the larger examples were most probably food containers, while smaller-scaled examples were used by women for toiletries and prized personal possessions.

The south Italian lekanis in fig. 38 is of the latter type. The decoration shows a scene of a woman seated on a chair, perhaps as an indirect reference to the feminine owner of the vase. The painter chose to decorate only the lid of this small vase, perhaps since any decoration on the low-slung underside of the bowl would have gone practically unnoticed by the viewer. The elaborate disk knob on the lid and the double finger holes in the handles suggest an imitation of metal prototypes.



38. Lekanis
South Italian (probably Sicily) red-figure
About 325-300 B.C.
Ht. 4⅝ in. (10.7 cm.)
12.1252

PYXIS

A pyxis is a small round container with a lid which was used by women to hold cosmetics and precious objects. The passage from Cicero suggests pyxides held small amounts of any special commodity. The term *pyxis*, dating from Roman times, has been retained in modern usage.

Examples of pyxides containing rouge, eye-makeup, etc., have been found in excavations. They also appear on vases showing both scenes of women's quarters and scenes of offerings at graves of women.

The pyxis in fig. 39 is Corinthian, and is larger than most Athenian types. Its intricately turned knob continues the richness of the painted decoration which not only stresses the basic shape but which is also in character with the precious-

... there *Licinius* would come to meet them and hand over the *pyxis* of poison.

Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 25.61

ness of the contents for which the vase was used.

The Athenian pyxis in fig. 40 is painted with scenes of women engaged in domestic pursuits, so common on these containers. Almost two centuries later than the Corinthian example, the Athenian potter chose to keep the vessel as simple as possible. Raised rims, incised rings and elaborate knobs have been all but eliminated. All decoration belongs to the efforts of the painter. This is explained by the goals of vase painting at this period. White ground vases, which had a thin layer of fine white clay applied to the surface before the figures were painted, are thought to be close approximations of wall paintings. If this was the ideal, then the demands on the potter were to produce a vase with broad, uninterrupted surfaces suitable for painting.



39. Pyxis
Corinthian
610-600 B.C.
Ht. $7\frac{7}{8}$ in. (20 cm.)
63.24



40. Pyxis
Attic white ground
The Painter of London D12
Domestic scenes
About 460 B.C.
Ht. $4\frac{3}{4}$ in. (12.1 cm.)
63.29

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